



# RSA TODAY

News for New York State's Rural Schools

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Rural Schools Association of New York State



I don't live in New York , I live In New York !

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**Dr. Robert Putnam is a Harvard researcher and author. He recently addressed the National Rural Education Association about America's disappearing Middle Class and how our rural schools can change our nation's future.**



## OUR KIDS: THE AMERICAN DREAM IN CRISIS

Dr. Robert Putnam of Harvard has some jarring realities for us. America's social class gap is dramatic and widening all the time. For instance, in the upper 1/3 of income earners, only 7% of students come from a one parent family. In the lower 1/3, that number is 70%. Both affluence and poverty are growing, while the middle class is dramatically going the way of the dinosaur. It's important information to have, because brain stimulation early on is affected; there is a huge cognitive divide in the early grades between affluent kids from two parent households and kids in poverty. It's made worse by the fact that our schools currently concentrate kids with resources away from those with problems. No more homogenous classrooms. As a nation, we put advanced learners on one track and those needing extra help on another-and never the twain shall meet. This shift away from the homogenous classroom has educational consequences in the short term and lifelong quality of life consequences for impoverished students. Our current approach, according to Putnam, compounds both advantages for the already "advantaged" and disadvantages for those already struggling with their life circumstances.

Here's how it plays out. Affluent kids get more parental interaction and extracurricular involvement, which leads to soft skill development, which is important for economic success. It predicts lifetime income better than test scores. As our schools face financial constraints, the concept of "pay to participate" has taken hold. This "Pay to Play" becomes insidious for those in poverty, as they obviously can't participate as readily and so lose out on the "soft skills", like teamwork, as well as the intergenerational interaction between coaches and mentors and advisors and the young people in their charge.

What's worse, poor kids are alone. They have little adult contact. According to a blunt Putnam, "We've ignored them and they're pissed." All kids do dumb things but the reaction to affluent kids is markedly different than for those in poverty...services versus juvenile justice system. "With affluent kids that make a mistake, the air bags immediately inflate to protect them. Lawyers, rehab. Poor kids get a one way ticket to the juvenile justice system. Schools didn't cause this but people look to schools to fix it."

Here are some haunting Putnam facts: Rich, smart kids graduate from college 74% of the time. Smart, poor kids graduate 4% of the time. Rich, less talented kids graduate from college more often than the most talented poor kids. Not fixing this social inequity costs the US \$5 trillion over the lives of these students, for social services.

For Putnam, all is not yet lost. He says America has stood exactly here before and fixed this. During the Industrial Revolution there was a huge gap between the rich and poor, a great deal of political corruption and political parties weren't helping fix things. Sound familiar? In 1890, the rich, like the Carnegies and Rockefellers understood the importance of an educated workforce and free public secondary schools resulted. The Reform Movement and Teddy Roosevelt invented the high school and all kids could get 4 years of secondary education for free. It was an idea that came from small towns in the Midwest. They had to convince rich people to pay for the education of other people's kids. When it worked, America became the world's leader in virtually every category, for over a century. For Putnam, the solution to our current version of this scenario is early childhood education: Bridge the cognitive gap, language use gap, socialization and adult interaction gap by providing all of our very young the same kind of mental and verbal stimulation and the adult contact that benefits our wealthy students. The question (now as then) is do we want to? Do we have the political will?

For all of our talk about the need for diversity, for Dr. Putnam much of the problem lies in our decreasing diversity. Families used to have diversity within extended families. Uncles and aunts ran a gamut of economic spheres; factory workers, white collar. Now we're polarized and have little familiarity with the lives of others who are in dissimilar circumstances. In Putnam's words, we have "no personal experience with folks on the other side of the tracks." We have no personal reference point, no empathy for how others are living. We think "I pulled myself up, why can't they?" but things have changed and they can't pull themselves up. The teller in the bank used to support a family. Now they can't support themselves. Indeed, Dr. Putnam's Westchester County grandkids don't know anyone who works with their hands.

Financial inequity isn't the only problem, it's not addressing the problems that kids in low income areas bring to school. Those problems must be funded. Those students need more funding and as we all know, they actually get less.

Think about this...The drop out rate of community colleges is 70%. Poor students typically get no degree, no certificate, largely because they have no adult help beyond the classroom...no help in enrolling, no help establishing financial aid. Putnam's controversial position is that free college is wrongheaded because it just helps poor people subsidize wealthy kids. Instead, we should be investing in pre-school and wrap around services. Think whole kid. VERY early wrap around and preschool. Home visits, parental visits and services.

The problem, folks is that research and government don't know how to fix the family. Dad isn't there and kids need him more than his money. The military was a big help when it was hiring, but it's not a jobs program. It won't take the lower 20% of high school graduates. Dr. Putnam says "Poor rural kids are the ones dying for us. Like Depression Era Europe, we are "dry tinder" for political extremism. People are isolated and there's no one to tell them the implications of what they're thinking, saying and doing."

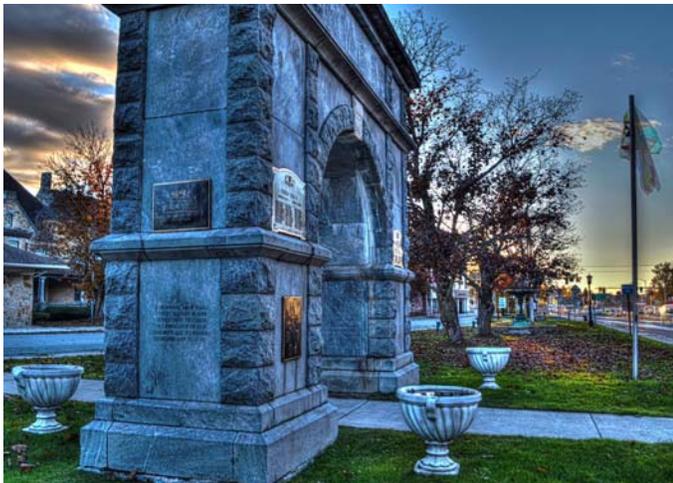
Beyond dramatically expanding preschool, there are other ways Dr. Putnam says can improve rural schools. Offering dual enrollment with High School teacher education courses. State Financial Assistance for teachers in specific course and specific geographic areas (loan forgiveness.) Supporting rural kids going home. Taking advantage of the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant, a federal program. Use BOCES, which is a perfect conduit for regional collaboration between teachers in like subject areas. On the practical side, new teachers want to know where the hospital is (may be planning a

pregnancy), we need to establish mentorships, coordinate spousal employment, we need to work with teacher pre programs (get teacher education programs and schools to do field trips to rural districts), get rural-specific courses in teacher prep programs, get a BOCES staff position of rural outreach coordinator to facilitate overcoming the challenges faced by young teachers moving into a rural district.

For Dr. Robert Putnam, America and our schools are not in a good place or heading in a good direction. But we have been here before and we know how to fix this. We even know the tremendous success the nation is likely to experience as a result. At the risk of sounding cheeky...seems like a way to make America great again.

## STUDENT PHOTO CONTEST

The greatest feature of our rural schools is the natural environment and the communities within it. It surrounds us and shapes our lives. Our students have a unique relationship to the land and the people around them. It's time to show off their world. RSA Today regularly features photos of rural New York State. We'd like to showcase the photos of our rural students that highlight the landscape, their community and their school. The top ten photo contest winners will be awarded prizes of \$100 scholarships and we will publish all winning photographs in future issues of RSA Today.



Gouverneur, New York.

Photo by Student Photographer

Kaytlin James of Carthage Central School District

### Give US Your Best Shot!

Simply send us your favorite photos to [dal295@cornell.edu](mailto:dal295@cornell.edu). Put Student Photo Contest in the subject line. Attach the photo file and tell us your name, school district and where the photo was taken. You can describe the photo anyway you'd like, but please keep it to caption length. Deadline for entry January 31, 2017.

**YOU CAN HELP SHOWCASE WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL, YOUR COMMUNITY AND YOUR AREA!**

## **TEACHER RECRUITMENT WOES STRAINING RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Let's review: It's the Great Recession and the state has reneged on its court ordered payment of additional funding for schools. In fact, it's moving headlong in the other direction; first freezing and then cutting aid by billions. For prospective teachers deciding whether to pursue a career in public education, the rhetoric is both startling and disturbing. State leaders are highly critical of the teaching profession, saying things like "we're not getting our money's worth." Perhaps this was an attempt to deflect attention away from the state's failure to uphold its constitutional responsibility for funding, or merely justifying the aid cuts. In either case, the message was loud and prolonged: New York State pays the most per student, while getting middle of the road results. Why throw more money at the situation?

The aid cuts forced massive staff layoffs. Tens of thousands of teachers lost their jobs as districts struggled with the simultaneous loss of aid and capped local property taxes. When things didn't turn around, those laid off teachers moved on to other districts or other work. Under state law, thousands more had to be hired back before districts could hire any new teachers. Once money started being restored to schools (2014-15-16) and schools could refill positions, the damage had been done. For several years, high school guidance counselors had been discouraging interested students from pursuing a profession that looked for all the world like it wouldn't have any jobs in the foreseeable future; and even if there were jobs, you'd be working in a new environment that was highly skeptical (if not critical) of teachers. Not surprisingly, school districts began reporting a lack of qualified applicants.

Rural school districts that (prior to the recession) regularly received dozens of applications for a position began scrambling to find any qualified applicants at all; particularly for STEM subjects. As in many things, rural schools felt the strain more than other districts. All of the factors listed here are compounded by those specific to our rural districts; namely that young, prospective teachers have concerns about locating in a rural community. If they are looking to meet someone, are there others their age in the community and events where they might meet? If they are married, is there an employment opportunity for their spouse? Is there affordable housing available? If they are looking to start a family, is there a health care facility nearby?

Finally, one of the biggest deterrents is the fact that rural districts have the lowest teacher pay across experience categories (years in service), while competing suburban districts (often those that are right next door) have the highest pay across all categories. Even those teachers who specifically want to live in a rural area often do so within commuting distance of a suburban district where they can work for significantly higher pay, a much better resourced work environment and more options for career advancement. They also get to avoid the lack of privacy many rural teachers experience when they want to be in their community but are constantly running into students and parents who want to talk shop.

Beyond an expanding economy, there are a number of actions both school districts and the state can make to turn the situation around. Your Rural Schools Association is currently conducting research into the severity of the issue and will make recommendations for fixing it. **To complete the research and convince state leaders to address the issue, we need your help! Please fill out the very brief survey about your district's experience, found in the RSA Deputy Director Gretchen Rymarchyk's article.** Together, you and your RSA can once again bring highly effective teachers to our rural students!



**DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S CORNER**  
**RESEARCH NEWS FROM CORNELL**

Greetings,

I am pleased to present to you an opportunity to collaborate with a Cornell researcher on a study!

**Dr. Gretchen Rymarchyk,**  
**Deputy Director RSA**

Professor Tom Hirschl teaches in Development Sociology with an emphasis on the intersection between technological progress and social crisis. He has worked with Professor Mark Rank at Washington University in St. Louis to create a tool that estimates one's likelihood to experience poverty, given certain demographic characteristics.

They would like to introduce this to high school students and measure its impact on their attitudes around poverty, and need some test groups. If your school district might be interested, contact me as soon as possible – and know that *if your students see this tool ahead of time, they are ineligible for the study.*

I have also provided some writings from Dr. Hirschl describing the study and the tool in his own words, and some links to further information on the professors and their work.

Also, I am providing a link to a very brief (less than 5 minutes of your time) survey for us to learn about the state of affairs in rural NY for recruiting and retaining teachers, so Dave can take the information to Albany to support the needs of rural schools. Please take the time to complete it, and feel free to forward the link to others who can provide more information. [https://cornell.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_3kKHARPyqSCh0AB](https://cornell.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3kKHARPyqSCh0AB)

If you have any questions about the survey or how it will be used, never hesitate to contact me.

Warmly,

Gretchen Rymarchyk  
[gkr1@cornell.edu](mailto:gkr1@cornell.edu)  
607-254-3557

Seeking High Schools to Collaborate on a Study of Poverty and Economic Inequality

Cornell Professor Tom Hirschl is looking for partners to collaborate on a research study assessing student attitudes toward poverty and economic inequality. The research follows up from his co-authored book *Chasing the American Dream* (2014, Oxford University Press), and involves a test/retest design in high school classrooms. Students will be asked a set of questions related to attitudes toward inequality, randomly assigned to treatment versus control groups, then tested again. To compensate students and the school, Professor Hirschl will provide the study data for use in high school curriculum (math, statistics, social studies, and consumer science), will provide a workshop to staff and/or students about how student attitudes compare to national attitudes and what can be done to improve student experiences. In addition, a small cash payment will be made for course budgets.

\*\*If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Gretchen Rymarchyk at [gkr1@cornell.edu](mailto:gkr1@cornell.edu) or 607-254-3557.

More from Dr. Hirschl:

The poverty risk calculator (URL "[riskcalculator.org](http://riskcalculator.org)") is a powerful tool that can provide insight into some of the more important dynamics of American poverty. The intended audience for the calculator is broad. We anticipate that it will be used by many different groups in order to delve further into the subject of American poverty. Such groups include community associations, high school classes, religious congregations, advocacy organizations, college students and their professors, policy think tanks, the engaged citizenry, and many others.

It turns out that the problem of poverty has historically been viewed in the United States as primarily affecting someone else. In particular, poverty has often been seen as a problem that affects minorities and the so-called underclass. As a result, the poor have been marginalized as falling outside the mainstream. In the public's perception, the divide between "us" (the nonpoor) and "them" (the poor) has been wide.

Yet what if it was the case that for many people, the "us" and "them" are one and the same? In other words, although the percentage of the population who are poor at any one time is relatively small, what if across the course of a lifetime, many people experience poverty? Such information could alter the perception of American poverty in at least two ways. First, such information breaks down the divide between the poor and the nonpoor. It suggests that for many of us, we are in fact both. Second, if a sizeable percentage of the population experiences poverty, it would imply that impoverishment is the result of failings at a systemic level. Rather than individual fault, widespread poverty could indicate problems at an economic and/or policy level.

Our recent book, *Chasing the American Dream*, looked further into the economic ups and downs of Americans. We found that while nearly everyone we interviewed believed in the reality of the American Dream, they nevertheless had encountered considerable economic turmoil throughout their adulthood years in pursuit of that dream, and 54 percent experienced poverty or near poverty between ages 25 and 60.

All of this work indicated that poverty across a lifetime was widespread. Yet how could we make this information more personal and direct? This was the genesis for the idea behind the poverty risk calculator. We decided that we could take our approach and data, and transform it into a tool that anyone could use in order to estimate their risk of poverty. Furthermore, such a tool could show people how their risk might vary depending on changes in their demographics. The result has been hundreds of hours of work and analyses going into the development of the poverty risk calculator. We believe that this tool has the ability to transform the discussion of poverty in America. It provides a personalization of poverty based upon scientific research that has not been possible in the past. As such, it opens a new window into one of America's most vexing problems.

Archimedes, the ancient Greek mathematician, once said referring to the action of a lever, "Give me but one firm spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth." We hope that we are providing you with one such lever on which to move the world.

More information on Tom Hirschl: <https://devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/people/thomas-hirschl>

More information on Mark Rank: <https://sociology.wustl.edu/people/mark-rank>

NYTimes article: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/opinion/sunday/calculate-your-economic-risk.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/opinion/sunday/calculate-your-economic-risk.html?_r=0)

The book won an award: <http://cornellcals.tumblr.com/post/138480962495/professor-hirschls-book-wins-coveted-social-work>



## NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR: TO LOVE YOUR WORK, LOVE YOUR KIDS!

**Meet National Rural Educator of the Year Virginia Sautner at the 2017 RSA Summer Conference, July 9-11 in Cooperstown!**

Virginia “Ginny” Sautner is the National Rural Teacher of the Year. She is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher from Lake Havasu, Arizona, where she teaches 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts and Student Government. (You remember Lake Havasu...It’s where London Bridge now lives!) For this nationally recognized educator, the most important advocacy is the advocacy we do on behalf of our students; not just about state and federal policy, it’s about advancing the individual interests and needs of our students. It’s about building a daily connection with kids and making sure they know you’re on their side, working together to give them the life they want.

Carrying out that approach is often easier on a personal level, as opposed to a schoolwide basis, though. Despite having a manageable number of students, rural schools experience roadblocks to building the kind of relationships that really matter in a child’s education. For instance, “Teacher turnover is financially and educationally harmful,” according to Ginny. Low pay, lack of employment for spouses, lack of nearby health care facilities and depressed housing opportunities are all reasons rural schools fail to attract and retain teachers. So what makes them stay?



“Teachers stay because of mentorships and meaningful learning opportunities. Relationships and connections are the key to learning”, says Sautner. Rural teachers need to feel valued, need a way to improve at their profession and be supported in that effort, particularly in the early years when turnover is highest. According to Ms. Sautner, extended mentoring is a proven method of focusing the kind of attention of professional development that shows a new teacher that their work is vital to the lives of children.

In rural settings, that mentoring might be done via Skype or Facetime with educators in similar positions in neighboring districts or even in districts with similar demographics across the state. A group of several science teachers in rural schools who are each responsible for teaching the entire science curriculum might share approaches, programs and lab work. Distance and isolation within the district doesn’t necessarily mean the educator can’t be connected to peers.



For Sautner, who embodies the best in rural education, the nature of rural education demands that a teacher simultaneously lead, follow and work as a team. “Be a leader, learner, collaborator. Teachers must be an advocate for their kids.” A yoga instructor as well, Sautner encourages us to release the many distracting influences on our work and to focus in on those things that are essential to improving the lives of our students. In our rural schools it’s often easy to become concerned over lack of employment opportunities, lack of contact with the world that our kids are well aware of due to television and social media, lack of educational opportunities, extracurricular activities, social and community events and projects.

For Virginia Sautner, the way to offset the effects of these influences is to build relationships within the community, within the school building and with professional colleagues. It’s an approach that has made her “the best of the best”.



## Online Speech Therapy Made Simple

### What is Online Speech Therapy?

Online speech therapy (otherwise known as **telepractice**) is when a **speech language pathologist (SLP)** **interacts with the client in a web-based venue. The SLP conducts the session much the same way as would be done face to face except instead of being physically in the same room, they communicate over the Internet in real-time.**

### Equipment

Modern technology has kept the hardware requirements rather modest. The therapist needs only a laptop with at least a 15-inch screen accompanied by a webcam and a headset that has a microphone attached. The video communication is provided through video conferencing software or hardware that is HIPAA compliant (e.g. GoToMeeting).

### Materials

The universe of original and useful materials is continuously expanding for clinicians. One of the initial drawbacks to teletherapy was the difficulty of sharing visual materials on the internet. However as the variety and availability of interactive materials and mobile apps grows this problem has largely disappeared.

In fact the process of selecting teletherapy materials is quite similar to that for onsite therapy now that there are many digital applications of the existing stock. But to compare face to face therapy with teletherapy regarding materials misses the point. The many creative digital apps are not only educationally and therapeutically innovative, but offer the child a very pleasurable experience besides. In this arena as well, teletherapy is exceeding the traditional face to face venue.

What's more, the wonders of modern technology offer therapists an entirely new dimension of expression for their creative talents. The growing popularity of digital photos provides a perfect opportunity for parents and therapists to collaborate in creating materials together. Children can now work with pictures of themselves and their family, developing critical skills while enjoying their loved ones.

### Benefits

The benefits of Telepractice are numerous and varied for both the districts and their administrators. It provides viable, evidence-based, cost-effective therapy by eliminating transportation expenses and staffing agency premiums to find therapists. Also, by alleviating recruiting, training, and managing SLPs, the administrator's time is freed up for other critical educational priorities

Since telepractice is IDEA compliant, it reduces complaints, mediation, and due process hearings. It streamlines administrative functions and tasks through the digital services provided. Online speech therapy provides maximum flexibility regarding the scheduling of session. And it ensures continuous therapy even when SLPs are absent or move.

## New York

The acceptance and popularity of telepractice continue to grow and expand steadily. To better assist districts in New York that are facing SLP shortages, [Global Teletherapy](#) is excited to offer their services to rural communities throughout the state. They currently serve districts and schools here in New York as well as in Nebraska. Global Teletherapy will tailor their services to district needs and work out a contract for services with the district.

**Editor's Note:** Your RSA is a proud partner with Global Teletherapy in serving the needs of rural school districts. Finding good therapists without paying for extensive travel time has been difficult for our districts and teletherapy provides effective services at tremendous cost savings. Contact RSA for referrals from districts already using teletherapy or to schedule a demonstration. We were very impressed and we think you will be too!



**RSA Executive Director Dave Little is presented with a certificate of appreciation from students of the Community Legislative Committee of Eastern Suffolk BOCES. Appearing at far right is William Miller, Vice President of Eastern Suffolk BOCES Board of Education.**